



**NAILAH K. BYRD**  
**CUYAHOGA COUNTY CLERK OF COURTS**  
1200 Ontario Street  
Cleveland, Ohio 44113

**Court of Common Pleas**

**New Case Electronically Filed: COMPLAINT**  
**April 6, 2021 17:10**

By: STEPHEN W. GARD 0001150

Confirmation Nbr. 2222062

DEBRA BUCKOSH

CV 21 945976

vs.

**Judge:** ASHLEY KILBANE

BONDED FILTER CO, LLC DBA BFC SOLUTIONS, ET  
AL

**Pages Filed:** 14

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS  
CUYAHOGA COUNTY, OHIO

DEBRA BUCKOSH  
30420 Wolf Road  
Bay Village, OH 44140

Plaintiff

-vs-

BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC  
dba BFC SOLUTIONS  
Suite D-210  
One Vantage Way  
Nashville, TN 37228

MATTHEW ASHWOOD  
Suite D-210  
One Vantage Way  
Nashville, TN 37228

MICHAEL MASSARO  
201 Gillespie Drive, Apt. 6206  
Franklin, TH 37067

STEVEN MACWILLIAMS  
321 Chalford Court  
Franklin TN 37228

LEE ANN SHEPARD  
Suite D-210  
One Vantage Way  
Nashville, TN 37228

AVALT  
79 Newberry Street  
Boston, MA 02116

MARK VERDI  
79 Newberry Street  
Boston, MA 02116

Defendants

CASE NO.

JUDGE:

COMPLAINT FOR DAMAGES  
AND EQUITABLE RELIEF FOR  
GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN  
EMPLOYMENT, RETALIATION,  
AND BREACH OF CONTRACT

JURY DEMAND ENDORSED HEREON

Comes now the Plaintiff, DEBRA BUCKOSH aka DEBRA DIXON (hereinafter referred to as DEBRA BUCKOSH), by and through her undersigned counsel, and for causes of action against Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, alleges and says:

**PARTIES AND VENUE**

1. Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH is, and at all times relevant herein has been, a resident of Cuyahoga County, Ohio.

2. Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH is a female and at all times relevant herein has been a member of the class of persons protected by all applicable statutes prohibiting gender discrimination in employment.

3. Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH was employed by Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC, dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, at an office located at 30420 Wolf Road, Bay Village, Ohio 44140, from January 21, 2019 to February 26, 2020.

4. At all times relevant herein Defendant BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC, dba BFC SOLUTIONS has engaged in business and employed in excess of 4 employees in the State of Ohio, and is, therefore, an “employer” within the meaning of all applicable Ohio statutes and laws.

5. Defendant MATTHEW ASHWOOD is, and at all times relevant herein has been, the CEO of Defendant BONDED FILTER COMPANY LLC, dba BFC SOLUTIONS and was, and

is, an “employer” within the meaning of all applicable Ohio statutes and laws.

6. Defendant MATTHEW ASHWOOD aided, abetted and directly participated in each of the wrongful and discriminatory acts and omissions alleged herein.

7. Defendant STEVEN MACWILLIAMS was, at all times relevant herein, the Chief Revenue Officer of Defendant BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS and an “employer” within the meaning of all applicable Ohio statutes and laws.

8. Defendant STEVEN MACWILLIAMS aided, abetted and directly participated in each of the wrongful and discriminatory acts and omissions alleged herein.

9. Defendant MICHAEL MASSARO was, at all times relevant herein, the Vice President of Operations of Defendant BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS and an “employer” within the meaning of all applicable Ohio statutes and laws.

10. Defendant MICHAEL MASSARO aided, abetted and directly participated in each of the wrongful and discriminatory acts and omissions alleged herein.

11. Defendant LEE ANN SHEPARD is, and at all times relevant herein was, the Vice President of Human Resources of Defendant BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS and an “employer” within the meaning of all applicable Ohio statutes and laws.

12. Defendant LEE ANN SHEPARD aided, abetted and directly participated in each of the wrongful and discriminatory acts and omissions alleged herein.

13. Defendant AVALT is, and at all times relevant herein was, a partnership with ownership of a substantial portion of the shares of Defendant BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS and an “employer” within the meaning of all applicable Ohio statutes and laws.

14. Defendant AVALT aided, abetted and directly participated in each of the wrongful and discriminatory acts and omissions alleged herein.

15. Defendant MARK VERDI is, and all times relevant herein was a partner in AVALT and a member of the Board of Directors of Defendant BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS and an “employer” within the meaning of all applicable Ohio statutes and laws.

16. Defendant MARK VERDI aided, abetted and directly participated in each of the wrongful and discriminatory acts and omissions alleged herein.

17. At all times relevant herein Defendant MARK VERDI was acting within the scope and course of his agency as a partner and employee of Defendant AVALT and Defendant AVALT is therefore liable for all of the wrongful and discriminatory acts and omissions of Defendant MARK VERDI.

18. Each and every act and omission of Defendants, and each of them, herein alleged occurred in the County of Cuyahoga, State of Ohio.

**ALLEGATIONS COMMON TO ALL CLAIMS**

19. Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH graduated from Boston University with a Bachelors of Arts degree.

20. Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH then received a Juris Doctor degree from Suffolk University School of Law.

21. Prior to being hired by Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, Plaintiff DEBRA

BUCKOSH had many years experience in the HVAC industry.

22. Prior to being hired by Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH had approximately seventeen years of sales experience, including the many years in the HVAC industry.

23. On or about January 4, 2019 Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH and Defendant BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS entered into a binding written contract whereby it was agreed as part of the incentive to secure the hiring of Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH, that BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS would “provide three (3) month’s severance, subject to local, state, and federal withholdings, provided the basis of separation is without cause.” A copy of said written contract is attached hereto as Exhibit A.

24. Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH accepted the offer of employment by Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, in reliance on the promise of severance set forth above in rhetorical paragraph 23.

25. Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH was hired as a sales person or account manager by Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI on or about January 21, 2019.

26. At all times during the period from on or about January 21, 2019 to February 26, 2020

Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH performed all her employment duties in a competent, efficient and professional manner.

27. At the time Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH was hired by Defendants it was specifically provided that Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH would report directly to Defendant STEVEN MACWILLIAMS.

28. During the course of Plaintiff's employment by Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, Defendant MATTHEW ASHWOOD repeatedly gave orders and instructions to Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH which were directly conflicting or incompatible with the direction and assignments given her by Defendant STEVEN MACWILLIAMS.

29. At all times relevant herein Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, had actual knowledge of repeated efforts by Defendant MATTHEW ASHWOOD to denigrate the skills and accomplishments and otherwise humiliate Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH solely because of her gender.

30. No male employee of Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI was subjected to similar denigration and humiliation by Defendants, or any of them, as was routinely imposed upon Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH.

31. Defendant MATTHEW ASHWOOD repeatedly subjected Plaintiff DEBRA

BUCKOSH to rude and sexist acts and omissions and a hostile work environment solely because of her gender with the knowledge and acquiesce of Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI.

32. Defendant MATTHEW ASHWOOD, with the actual knowledge and acquiescence of Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, repeatedly sabotaged Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH's ability to perform her job duties by prohibiting her from attending scheduled sales meetings or requiring that she be accompanied by a male coworker.

33. Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, never subjected any male salesperson or other male employee to the hostile acts, omissions and sabotage to which Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH was routinely subjected.

34. On or about February 26, 2020 Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, terminated the employment of Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH.

35. Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, had no just cause or legitimate



business reason for the termination of the employment of Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH.

36. On or about February 26, 2020 Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, admitted that there was no cause for the employment termination of the Plaintiff and offered to pay her the agreed severance payment but only if she agreed to additional terms never previously discussed or agreed to.

37. Any alleged just cause or legitimate business reason which may be asserted by Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, or any of them, for the employment termination of Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH is entirely false and pretextual.

38. At all times relevant herein Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, have hired and retained employees with the same or similar job duties as Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH who are male and, in addition, had less relevant training, experience, tenure and qualifications than those possessed by Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH.

39. At all times relevant herein since February 26, 2020 Defendant BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, with the knowledge and direct participation of Defendants MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, have refused to pay

Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH the \$30,000 severance as provided in the contractual agreement hereinabove alleged.

40. The sole reason why Defendants, and each of them, have breached the contractual agreement to pay Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH the agreed severance was to retaliate against Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH for her refusal to waive and release her claims for gender discrimination against the Defendants, and each of them.

41. At the time of the termination of the employment of Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH by Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, the Plaintiff was earning in excess of \$120,000.00 per year, plus a minimum of \$52,000.00 in annual commissions and other employment benefits including but not limited to health insurance, dental insurance, life insurance, a 401(k) retirement plan and vacation and sick leave benefits.

42. The actions of Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and each of them, have caused Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH to suffer severe emotional distress.

43. The actions of Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, complained of herein were willful, malicious and undertaken in conscious disregard for the rights and well-being of Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH.

**FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

44. Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH realleges and incorporates by reference herein the allegations contained in rhetorical paragraphs 1-43.

45. Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH was removed from her rightful employment position as a salesperson and terminated from her employment by Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, solely because of her gender.

46. Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT, MARK VERDI and other persons, and each of them, aided, abetted, incited, compelled or coerced the others in the doing of the unlawful discriminatory practices and act of terminating the employment of Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH as hereinabove alleged.

47. Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT, MARK VERDI and other persons, and each of them, obstructed or prevented the others from complying with Chapter 4112 of the Ohio Revised Code.

48. The actions of Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, were direct, intentional, deliberate and willful violations of Chapter 4112 of the Ohio Revised Code.

49. As a proximate result of the wrongful actions of Defendants BONDED FILTER

COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, hereinabove alleged there is due and owing to Plaintiff DEBRA DIXON a sum in excess of \$120,000.00 per year in unpaid back wages, plus commissions, accrued retirement benefits, insurance benefits, accrued vacation and sick time, and other benefits plus compensatory and exemplary damages.

**SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION**

50. Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH realleges and incorporates by reference herein the allegations contained in rhetorical paragraphs 1-49.

51. Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, retaliated against Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH for her refusal to waive and release Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, from liability for their acts of gender discrimination by (a) breaching its contractual obligation to pay Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH \$30,000.00 in severance when her employment was terminated without cause.

52. The actions of Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, were direct, intentional, deliberate and willful violations of Chapter 4112 of the Ohio Revised Code.

53. Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS,

MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT, MARK VERDI and other third persons, and each of them, aided, abetted, incited, compelled or coerced the others in the doing of the unlawful discriminatory practice and act of retaliating against Plaintiff DEBRA DIXON.

54. Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT, MARK VERDI and other third persons, and each of them, obstructed or prevented the other(s) from complying with Chapter 4112 of the Ohio Revised Code.

55. As a proximate result of the wrongful acts of Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT, MARK VERDI and other third persons there is due and owing to Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH compensatory and exemplary damages in an amount to be determined by the jury.

### **THIRD CAUSE OF ACTION**

56. Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH realleges and incorporates by reference herein the allegations contained in rhetorical paragraphs 1-55.

57. Defendant BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, breached the contract made between it and Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH by refusing to perform the contract it had made with the Plaintiff to pay her \$30,000.00 in severance.

58. As a direct and proximate result of the wrongful actions of Defendant BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, hereinabove alleged there is due and owing to Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH a sum of \$30,000.00 in severance.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH prays this Court for a judgment:

A. That an injunction issue prohibiting Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, from continuing to unlawfully discriminate against Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH;

B. That an Order issue making Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH whole by an award of appropriate back pay and front pay, including unpaid wages, commissions, benefits, and sick and vacation benefits, reinstatement without loss of seniority with all accrued employment bonuses and benefits and/or rehire;

C. That Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH recover from Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, compensatory damages in an amount to be determined at trial;

D. That Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH recover from Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT and MARK VERDI, and each of them, exemplary damages in an amount to be determined at trial;

E. That Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH recover from Defendants BONDED FILTER COMPANY, LLC dba BFC SOLUTIONS, MATTHEW ASHWOOD, MICHAEL MASSARO, STEVEN MACWILLIAMS, LEE ANN SHEPARD, AVALT

and MARK VERDI, and each of them, all costs of this action and reason-able attorney fees;

F. That Plaintiff DEBRA BUCKOSH recover from Defendants, and each of them, pre- and post- judgment interest on all sums awarded;

G. That such other relief as may be just and proper be awarded by this Court.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Stephen W. Gard

STEPHEN W. GARD (0001150)

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Cleveland, OH 44115

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Counsel for Plaintiff Debra Buckosh

**JURY DEMAND**

Plaintiff demands trial by jury on all claims asserted herein.

/s/ Stephen W. Gard

Counsel for Plaintiff Debra Buckosh